

Entrepreneurial Services Spotlight

Russ Moyer is the entrepreneurial business owner of Midwest Auto Center in Wellsville, Kansas. His business is located at 710 S. Main Street. Russ opened Midwest Auto Center in 2005. We sat down with Russ to learn more about the services his business offers as well as the story about how he came to build this successful Wellsville business.

Midwest Auto Center (MAC) offers full-service automotive repair services. They offer dependable automotive repair services and quality replacement parts at competitive prices and guarantee all repairs and parts with a 36-month/36,000-mile warranty. If you have any problem with your car, truck or SUV, they fix it right the first time -- usually the same day you drop your vehicle off or while you wait. They work on both gas and diesel engines.

MAC provides oil changes, tune-ups, transmission services, fuel system flushes, engine coolant flushes and fuel filter replacement. They also have specialized diagnostic equipment to access your vehicle's data and pinpoint the cause of any electrical problem. This includes SRS airbag issues. The technicians at MAC can also diagnose steering and suspension issues and fix any problem with ball joints, tire rod ends, sway bar links, control arm bushings, shocks, struts, and springs using high quality replacement parts. Their A/C specialists can detect leaks, recharge systems and fix evaporators and compressors. They can even retrofit vehicles to R-134a. MAC mechanics can fix and replace disc brakes, drum brakes, parking brakes – the entire braking system. They use award-winning Wagner brake pads and parts for quiet, high-quality performance. And finally, MAC offers a broad range of new tires for all makes and models of cars and trucks. Tire services include computer balancing, wheel alignment, tire rotation and flat repair.

Russ comes from a family of entrepreneurs. His great-grandfather on his mother's side opened a tractor dealership in Wellsville in the 1930's. It is still operated by his family today in Lawrence KS. His grandfather on his father's side was the manager of a successful automotive service department for an Overland Park Buick dealership, where he retired. Russ's dad owned and operated an auto repair shop in Wellsville through the 90's, where he spent countless hours learning the trade. Russ spent several semesters of his senior year attending Olathe Advanced Technical Center, pursuing automotive repair technology and competing in SkillsUSA/Vica at the state level. He is still active on the OATC advisory board and attends student relation activities at the facility on the Olathe North Campus. Post high school Russ attended Oklahoma State University and gained an associate's degree in applied science, along with certifications in automotive repair from Daimler Chrysler and ASE.

After college, Russ worked as a technician at a Dodge Chrysler Jeep dealership. Due to an injury he moved to working in customer service and finally asst. manager of an Overland Park Buick/Isuzu dealership. When asked why he decided to quit working for "the man" and start his own business, Moyer replied, "I wanted to get away from all the politics of the dealerships and be my own boss. I

always felt like I could do it better than whoever was leading me at the time. No better way to prove it than to start your own business. You are the be all end all, good, bad or indifferent.”

We talked about how he marketed his business in the early years. Russ said, “Direct marketing was the most effective way to get the word out about his new business.” He also said, “We’d go out to lunch locally and meet people and find we could help them with their automotive needs. We’d meet our customers one at a time.”

We discussed how being an entrepreneur has affected his family life. Russ admitted that it is hard to keep from taking the stress home to his wife, Crystal, and their kids. When asked, he said, “big points of stress are employee’s calling in, parts not showing up when we expect them to, or when equipment would quit working. All these things affect the outcome and/or timeline of completing jobs.” He also said, “in the first 5 years, there was a lot of stress trying to build a customer base, keeping those customers happy and ensuring the employees he was paying were busy with work.”

Ten or so years ago, Russ told me he “drew a line in the sand and decided to not work late or work on the weekends.” I liked his personal motto, “This business is not my life, it’s a job.” Along the way, Moyer learned the hard lesson that you can’t make everyone happy all the time. As hard as he and his staff try, sometimes things get delayed or go wrong. The business motto at Midwest Auto helps to guide technicians in making decisions about work to be done to a car is, “If this was my car, would I recommend this service/repair?” He said that has really helped his customers realize that Midwest Auto Center is not going to recommend any service that isn’t necessary just for the sake of a sale. He knows his customers know where to find him and will be back with other issues in the future if they can trust Midwest Auto Center is looking out for their best interest.

Russ said it took about that same 10 years to establish Midwest Auto Center enough to where he felt comfortable taking off time when he wanted or needed to. Midwest Auto Center currently employs a full-time service advisor, ~~and~~ two full-time technicians and several part time employees. Russ described the culture there as “laid back” no one likes to be stressed. He said that all the employees working there are around the same age, have similar interests, listen to the same music, and have a good work ethic. Russ’s employees know he trusts them and has their back when issues arise. He said one of his biggest challenges about finding the right employee is that younger people today aren’t willing to start at the bottom, learn the basics and work their way up to higher positions. He said they start as a new technician and don’t want to change oil or tires. He said, “these are basic duties that every-technician needs to master.” Russ also mentioned that he takes work experience over bookwork or certifications any day. He has found that some people might know the philosophy of mechanics from classes, but they don’t have the aptitude for working on automobiles.

When I asked Russ about how entrepreneurial “tricks” he’s discovered along his journey, he said having a to-do list or list of goals is imperative. He also mentioned that you need to ensure you have a market and a need for your service before establishing a business of any kind. He also recommended avoiding debt as much as possible. He feels that the best way to start a business is to save money for the initial investment, then launch your business to reduce financial stress.

We talked about his top three skills needed to be a successful entrepreneur. Russ said, “you have to stay determined, keeping an eye on what you want your business to look like.” He said, “it’s important to set goals and know what you are striving and working so hard for.” Russ said from the beginning, he had a goal to find the right person to run the daily operations, so he could feel comfortable taking time off from his business and leave it to someone he could whole-heartedly trust. Another goal was to purchase the property his business is located on. Russ had been able to make both of those things happen. And last, but not least, Russ said, “You have to have passion about the business you start or even the profession you pursue. Every growing business goes through growing pains, you need to have that passion to get you through those tough times. I had a vision of what I wanted my business to be, and I never lost focus of that.”

When asked about what the best part is of being an entrepreneur, Russ said, “the gratification of building it from the ground up.” He mentioned the worst part as being the one responsible for everything about the business. He said, “that can be a lot of stress at times.”

For fun, I asked a couple off topic questions. I asked Russ if he had a magic wand, what are a couple things you’d like to change in the world. His reply was, “work ethic and the way people treat each other.” Don’t we all wish he had a magic wand to make those things happen? I also asked him what part of his life experience he would alter if he could. His response was, “I’d be more active in high school. I’d go out for more sports and get involved in more organizations. I’d apply myself more.”

If you have an automotive need and would like to visit Midwest Automotive Center, please call them at 785-883-2611, check out the website at <https://www.midwest-autocenter.com/>, or contact them through Facebook!

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